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What one could cursorily call the "language" question in EU social policy is generally overlooked by social scientists. Under the apparently benign use of one of the varieties of "international English", the EU perhaps provides the clearest illustration of the tendency of the blurring of the frontiers between politics, social science and political communication. This *mélange des genres* affects both the participants in the *production* of the languages of social policy[1], the spaces where they craft them, and the ensuing discourses that travel across Europe and beyond. After a short section devoted to the definition of "social policy" at the EU level, we will outline a theory of the production and circulation of social policy languages within the borders of the EU.[2] In a third section, we will provide examples of this production and circulation of social policy languages. The empirical base for the chapter is twofold: the first is a reflection originating from the author's continual participation – as a non-native speaker of English – in various academic forums over the last 20 years. The second is the writing over the same period of a series of monographs about social policy concepts. Most of the time, my sociological unease experienced in "international research situations" (Barbier, 2005) triggered the writing of these monographs, none of which, incidentally, was ever commissioned. Just to give an illustration from the start: one of our first experiences of uneasiness occurred with the concept of "welfare state" at a time when the notion was extremely hegemonic (Barbier & Théret, 2001). Concurring with Merrien (1997), we argued that the notion of "*État-providence*" in French was inadequate for many reasons, notably for its focus on the state as the only actor: social protection (*la protection sociale, soziale Sicherung, la protezione sociale,* etc.) was a more encompassing notion (Barbier, 2008, ch.1; see Daniel Beland's chapter in the present volume). More than 10 years later, the mainstream currency of the phrase "social protection" has received a strong support in the comparative literature by virtue of its use by international organizations dealing with the poor and with the social programs in the developing countries.[3]

"Social policy" at "the EU level": linking two problematic notions with one another

There is no doubt about the existence of a broad aggregation of "social matters" that are of interest to politicians and officials belonging to the formal institutions of the European Union, as well as their counterparts in the nation-states. Whether this hotchpotch of programs and social topics extending

[1] There are languages and not one language, because, as we shall see, the forums where they circulate are numerous and partly fragmented according to policy areas, sectors or countries.

[2] The focus of this chapter is the European Union, and for the sake of brevity, we shall not deal directly with the circulation and production of social policy languages beyond its frontiers, although the mechanisms involved are entirely similar.

[3] Here are two typical instances of the use: J. Stiglitz, American economist, discussing inequality on radio *France Culture*, October, 10th, 2012, talked of social protection and not of welfare. In one of its editorials dealing with China and Asia, *The Economist* wrote "pressure is growing for public pensions, national health insurance, unemployment benefits and other hallmarks of social protection" (September, 8th, 2012, p. 9).

across 27 nation-states stands as a sociologically objectifiable "policy" is another matter. As long as the EU has never been a significant player for redistribution (Majone, 1993), it is indeed difficult to accept that it has ever had classic "social policies". Hence, it is only *by extension* that one can accept that there is such a thing as a genuine "EU social policy". Instead, rather than a fully-fledged policy, the substance of "EU social policy" lies in the organization of ideas, concepts, rules and norms that EU elites promote: the eventual outcome of their continuous struggles between "social models" (as the expression goes) lies in the legitimization of a certain discourse about the state of the world among elite actors. All of them are intensely engaged in the use of these categories in the transnational debate in their own national polities (Barbier, 2013).

Despite its very common use, the expression "at the EU level" is no less problematic. While we now have a significant and convincing body of literature on the multi-level governance of the European Union (Scharpf, 1999), the image of "levels" it conveys is ambiguous when it comes to identifying the *spaces* where social policy languages originate and have currency. If one may identify EU institutions (e.g., the Parliament, the Council) as clearly different from national institutions (e.g., governments, national legal systems), the spaces where discourses are crafted and disseminated are populated with actors such as individuals and interest groups, lobbies and representatives of various constituencies, members of epistemic communities, and participants in advocacy coalitions. Empirically, these participants can never be identified only as belonging to a "European" level, or for that matter to a national one; as administrators, journalists, researchers, politicians, lobbyists, experts, consultants, spin-doctors, etc., all have crucial links with one or more national interests and entities (e.g., universities, firms, parties, institutions), while at the same time they all belong to EU and to national spaces, forums and arenas. This is why it is impossible to clearly separate the so-called "EU level" from the "national level". This situation is all the more relevant for the object of the present reflection, i.e. the trans-, inter-, and cross-national language of social policy. For lack of alternative concepts, however, we will use the expression EU-level without inverted commas in the rest of this chapter.

The production and circulation of social policy languages in EU public forums

A long tradition of sociology has dealt with ideas, since Max Weber. The literature has since generated many concepts; one of them is the notion of *référentiel*[4], which offers advantages vis-à-vis other concepts. Moreover, it is essential to identify the spaces where these cognitive and normative frameworks – here seen mainly as "languages" – are produced: we shall describe these "forums" and show how they are differentiated. However differentiated though, the rule of the games played in transnational forums has often been one of confusion between political and social science languages. In addition, it should be noted that the languages of social policy at the EU level are produced in international English*es* (Ostler, 2011[5]), and this has crucial consequences.

[4] The concept clearly features among social science concepts that are not strictly translatable. When he wrote in English, B. Jobert has used "cognitive framework" (2003), while when he writes in French, he stresses that the cognitive element is only one element, along with the expressive (images) and the normative (values and norms) (Jobert, 1998).

[5] Contrary to the mainstream belief that English is unified, empirical demonstration of its variety abounds. N. Oslter has shown that this variety has increased, and that there exist many varieties of international English, hence international English*es*.

Ideas, cognitive and normative frameworks

Any sociological analysis of discourses should start from the basic Weberian assertion about worldviews and ideas which function as "shunters" (*Weichensteller*) for the channeling of interests. After this initial proposition, social science literature has proposed various concepts for analyzing the role of worldviews and ideas that we will not be able to review here systematically: P. A. Hall (1993) used the concept of paradigm, which was explicitly discussed by Jobert (1998). Although less often cited in the English language literature, Jobert's (1998) notion of *référentiels* is very useful for the analysis of social policy languages in the EU. *Référentiels* comprise the set of values, norms, algorithms (theories of action) and images that underpin a particular policy. In contrast to policy paradigms, they also have an *explicit* normative dimension. The fact that they comprise images points to the expressive aspect of language. Moreover, *référentiels* have a cultural link to the polities, the political cultures and the national languages where they find their origin (Barbier, 2008). In the EU context, this latter aspect is obviously more complex to objectify methodologically, because policy-making is carried out in a "multicultural", multilingual context, but this does not prevent the use of the concept. Understanding the production and dissemination of social policy languages at this "level" means also including the cultural and linguistic aspects that are generally ignored. Written by English-speaking researchers and politicians, many social policy texts are conceived as if the whole world was uniformly Anglophone and dealing with universal forms of policies and concepts. Social policy languages at the EU level thus provide various discursive arrangements of *référentiels*. In this sense, as we shall see in the third section, there exist *référentiels* for "employment", "labour market", "activation policies", for "flexicurity strategies", for "social investment policies" and the like. These languages are produced in certain spaces and staged on certain scenes by various collections of actors.

Forums and arenas

As already hinted at, it is impossible to strictly delineate the spaces where the production of social policy languages occurs between national and "European." This is true because today, within the EU, whatever the "level" or "scale", no forum can strictly be "national".[6] These are public spaces, in the sense that they are group actors deemed to act in the realm of the public interest: the extent to which they really are public, however, remains to be assessed empirically each time we deal with one of them. The basic typology we share with Jobert (2003; 1998, p. 133-137) distinguishes between arenas and forums, and among forums, between three types: "forums of political communication", "forums of policy communities", and "scientific forums". Such forums are active for each policy area or domain; although they often overlap, the "employment" forums are not the same as the "pension" forums. For any policy domain at the EU level, there are three main forums where actors debate and fight about the language. Sectoral forums build up the "social policy forum," which is discussed here for the sake of simplicity.

The concept of "field", inspired by Bourdieu, has sometimes been used for the same purpose, but it is at the same time too vague and too constraining (Favel & Giraudon, 2011, p. 21). It is thus

[6] In a very bold statement made before the French Parliament on October, 15th, 2012, V. Reding, Vice President of the EU Commission, stated that there was no such thing anymore as "*politique intérieure*": any policy and politics, she meant, was now European (see http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/ accessed October, 15th, 2012).

preferable not to use this concept for fear of implicitly buying into the entire corpus of Bourdieuian conceptual paraphanelia ("habitus", "struggle", "forms of capital", "symbolic violence", etc..). *Arenas* are different from forums, not only because they are much more selective: they group a small number of actors who make decisions, notably about legislation. The Employment Committee, mandated to help the Council in the field of employment and social affairs is such an arena. The EU Commission is another such arena. In arenas, debates and compromises take place, but they are not the locus par excellence for the crafting of social policy languages, and this is why we concentrate here on *forums*. Obviously, members of the arena also participate in one or more of the forums, where they may also participate in the production of social policy languages.

The first type of forum is the "forum of political communication". Within national public spaces, this forum brings together citizens, the media, politicians and their spin-doctors. This is the forum where politicians argue about their solutions and where various coalitions compete for elections on a national basis. The transnational forum of political communication dedicated to social policy is so large that no existing media can cover the entire European situation. Debates are fragmented according to national languages and polities, and there exists no homogenous EU electoral process (Barbier, 2013). Yet for social policy language, the role of this forum is extremely important: its key actors are the Commissioners, the President of the Commission and the Council, the members of the European parliament, and Brussels-based journalists and think tanks.[7] However, this forum is very seldom the place where social policy languages originate: more generally, this forum uses languages crafted elsewhere.

European international English is the language of this elite forum, which is exclusively populated by English speakers who read *The Economist* and the *Financial Times*. However, the fact that this forum brings together members of a very exclusive elite does not mean that political communication about social policy is reserved for internal consumption. The EU Commission has never abandoned the project of convincing (and sometimes manipulating) European citizens. As a political communication (propaganda) tool that it is increasingly, Eurobarometer[8] plays a key role, as demonstrated by an example about "flexicurity". From 2005, as the Barroso presided Commission had limited its social projects to a minimum (Barbier, 2008), the Commission was looking for a cross-cutting discursive theme in order to appear to be pursuing social goals of its own. Social Affairs Commissioner Spĭdla thus used "flexicurity" as a rallying flag that could contain both vague and elastic meanings. The problem was that no one really knew what "flexicurity" meant. Nevertheless, the Commission commissioned a special Eurobarometer survey and asked European samples of citizens to approve/disapprove a set of 5 assertions.[9] Notwithstanding the fact that interviewees and interviewers ignored the meaning of "flexicurity", the authors of the report eventually concluded that European citizens "indirectly" applauded "flexicurity" in huge numbers because a large majority of respondents approved each of the five assertions. This example is typical of the way the forum of

[7] Again: note that the individuals concerned are at the same time members of the «EU-level» and one or more «national level» forums.

[8] Eurobarometer is the standard opinion survey funded and managed by the European Commission: it is one of the very few really cross-national sources of data in the EU.

[9] Hence: "regular training improves one's job opportunities"; "life-time jobs with the same employer are a thing of the past"; "being able to change easily from one job to the other is a useful asset to help people to find jobs nowadays"; "work contracts should become more flexible to encourage job creation" and, finally, "many people retire too early" (Eurobarometer, October 2006, no 65.3, question 18).

political communication contributes to the formulation and diffusion of social policy language at the EU level.

The second forum is the forum for the "social policy community" (for a parallel notion, see Falkner, 1998). Within this forum, some members form an "epistemic community" and interact with people who are especially involved in the conception and implementation of a specific type of social policies, as envisaged at the EU level. The forum welcomes all sorts of administrators, experts, journalists, lobbyists (and various advocacy coalitions, NGOs), as well as social scientists specializing in social policy. Even more than in the case of the "political communication forum", national "social policy community forums" cannot remain insulated from their EU-level counterparts. In the third section, we illustrate its functioning with empirical cases.

Finally, there is the scientific forum for social policy. By definition, because of the universal claim of social science analysis, scientific forums in general are transnational. However, the "universal" characteristic is controversial. Note that Bourdieu (2002) has rightly alluded to this, stressing that the conditions of production of ideas, their contexts, and the "dominant national traditions" should be taken into consideration. The features of the social policy scientific forum at the EU level still greatly differ today from their national-level counterparts. The social policy scientific forum is characterized by its multi-disciplinary profile and the dominant role played by EU funding. The latter explains the fact that compared with national social science forums, the EU level forum is much more "policy-oriented". "Policy lessons" have become, alongside "dissemination", a crucial criterion for selecting research projects for funding. This has important consequences for the production of social policy languages at the EU level: the research topics in the forum are directly formulated in political terms, and the political language used by politicians, experts and administrators is directly used in the scientific forum. The amount of time and research the forum devotes to conceptual issues is therefore very limited (Barbier, 2005). This key aspect of the *mélange des genres* will be illustrated in the third section of this chapter but, at this point, it is important to stress that the language used for formulating both political problems and EU social policy categories and theories, is one form of international English, if not entirely Commission-speak or Eurospeak. Researchers are involved in evaluation studies, in consultancy, and in various scientific and dissemination activities and are aware that participation in these scientific forums overlaps to a large extent with the policy community forum. The traditional research ethics, on the other hand, would normally prevent social scientists from participating as such in the "political communication" forums.[10]

The mélange des genres

At the EU level, it is thus very difficult to establish clear separations between the policy community and the scientific forums as concerns their role in the production and dissemination of social policy languages. One of the main challenges in this respect is the blurred nature of the documents, reports and analyses produced at this level, and the uncertain contexts of their production (commissioning, evaluation of their quality, etc.). Sometimes, as the example of the annual report *Employment in Europe* shows, documents feature a mix of political statements and scientific studies (Barbier, 2005). Normally, one of the features of the scientific forum is that its products are assessed among peers –

[10] Nevertheless, we observe an increasing number of cases where social scientists directly and explicitly participate in the political communication debate, as promoters of specific policy (see Vanderbroucke *et al.* 2011).

i.e. social scientists of the same discipline. Social scientists are at pains to establish clear-cut distinctions between their production as consultants and their genuine scientific output[11], generally published in peer-reviewed journals and books. Some social scientists, however, question the very legitimacy of this distinction. Economists, especially welfare economists, argue that their discipline inevitably entails the production of normative conclusions, whereas many sociologists argue in favour of the opposite contention (Barbier, 2008). All in all, the special characteristics of the scientific forum at the EU level tend to downplay conceptual and theoretical discussion, they bring together different disciplinary approaches without controlling for their conditions of co-operation, and tend to minimize, if not ignore altogether, the dangers of mixing politics and research. This is the fate of "international research situations" that often lead to the reality that – except for orthodox economics – academic production seldom occurs in the context of research contracts funded by the European Union: social scientists have to rework their material in order to produce texts that live up to academic criteria (Barbier, 2005).

English as the lingua franca of social science

The role of English as the *lingua franca* of both EU research and politics plays a major role. In the limits of the present chapter, it is impossible to formulate a detailed discussion about unfairness that the domination of English has produced in Europe since the 1970s. We shall limit ourselves here to the consequences of this domination in the production of social policy language at the EU level. To go directly to the main point: for social scientists (economists are a special case here), "Eurospeak" and the European English language provide the first obstacle to take on, if they want to be faithful to the values of their discipline. Translation at the EU level inevitably leads to erasing diversity, accuracy and, in the end, "scientific truth." And yet, in sociology and political science, while it is generally recognized that language (and hence languages) are essential in political activity, these disciplines implicitly postulate that language is a secondary aspect of research and that the problems it raises will eventually be solved through translation – *into English*. Few comparative researchers assign explicit importance to languages, even though linguistic questions constantly arise in ethnographic observation, statistical categories, and in the history of political action. The central importance of this issue has to do with the fact that language cannot be reduced to a code, because of its signifying or expressive dimension (Hagège, 1985). Nevertheless, the importance of language for research, beginning with concepts, is seldom stressed genuinely. Moreover, as we have shown, concepts that are essential for social policy are often not directly translatable into English, or the other way round, from English into other languages (see the examples of welfare state, of *rapport salarial*, of *politiques d'insertion*, to take only a few – for a wider exploration of this see Barbier, 2013). These problems are, de facto, ignored most of the time in the social policy scientific forum at the EU level. What is lost in translation in the forum is more often than not "scientific truth" as a discourse contestable among peers.

The antidote to the instrumental impoverishment of social science analysis lies in in-depth studies, but these are unfortunately often impossible to implement in "international research situations". The problem and obstacle that European English constitutes for research in social policy will be further

[11] Take a typical function of the forum: ministers are invited by the EU Commission in Brussels for a «stakeholder conference» about flexicurity (April, 20th 2007). In the same panel sit T. Wilthagen, a sociologist (see further) and F. Müntefering, former German Social affairs minister. Incidentally, the minister declares that, flexicurity is a dishonnest term [« *es ist ein unechtes Wort* »}.

illustrated later, but let me conclude the present section by presenting a typical Danish social policy example: in Denmark there used to be two social "programs" that enabled people to retire early: one was called *førtidspension*, the other *efterløn.* The botched instrumental English translation used by international organisations designates both programs as "early retirement." Yet any researcher working in Denmark realizes that these programs operated quite differently and derived their legitimacy from different sources. The language that differentiates them makes this clear: the first is an early retirement due to disability or inability to continue work, literally a "pension" given "beforehand" (*førtid*); the second, early retirement in the period prior to formal pension, consists of wages (*løn*) received afterwards (*efter*). An in-depth study shows that the latter program is supported by an optional contribution by employees who thereby earn their early departure from the labour force; the *førtidspension,* however, is the result of a social partners' decision that grants those unable to continue working to leave "beforehand". Anyone who fails to make this distinction and simply refers to both as "early retirement" cannot understand why the two programs were reformed in very different ways over the last ten years.

Social policy forums and language at the EU level: three illustrations

In one national language and within the boundaries of a certain country, it is possible to historically analyze the genesis of elements (notions, concepts, images, etc.) of social policy language and assess their evolution and currency over the years. When it comes to the EU level (or the transnational level more generally), the task of exhaustively exploring the production and diffusion of social policy languages appears impossible because of the sheer number of forums and national/transnational interactions: each social policy language at the EU level has various national-historical roots.[12] The concepts used in the European social policy languages could each provide ample material for writing as many books as there are social policy concepts, if one took into account the various national-historical roots in all the European idioms[13]. In this section, we will obviously not achieve this. Instead, we discuss three concepts as illustrations. The three concepts are flexicurity, workfare/activation and social investment

Flexicurity

The term "flexicurity" was never a concept in the German and French sense of a concept (*Begriff*). Rather, the term acquired wide currency and a central position in social policy language at the EU level in the years 2005-2008, in all the three forums explored in this chapter. We already mentioned its manipulative use in the "political communication forum". The 2008 financial crisis marked an end to this spin-doctoring success, but the notion of flexicurity is still (moderately) used today in the "policy community" and the "scientific" forums. The fate of this term is also an illustration of the fact that social policy language at the EU level is constantly subjected to fads.

Although it is derived from two English words (flexibility and security), the term has identified roots in Dutch forums (scientific and policy community ones). It was first coined for political communication by the Dutch sociologist Hans Adriaansens, acting as an adviser for the socialist politician Ad Melkert. This was the time when the *Wet Zekerheid en Flexibilitet (Act)* was debated in

[12] Examples are the French « *insertion* »; the Swedish « *arbeidjslinjen* »; the British « welfare state » ; the German « *Zumutbarkeit* » (see Barbier, 2013).
[13] For an excellent illustration in German, see Lessenich (2003).

the Netherlands. The term “flexicurity” was coined in 1995 (Wilthagen, 1998, p. 13). It made sense in the context of the Dutch political project of the late 1990s (Wilthagen, 2002; Madsen, 2006; Barbier, 2007). Essentially, this project was to negotiate with unions a reform of social protection and labour market legislation in order to have more flexible employment contracts and to enhance access to social security benefits for part-time workers.

Outside the Netherlands and its forums, the dissemination of the notion is clearly attributable to the EU forums, and can historically be ascribed to the pioneering work of two academics, acting as consultants and advisors to political actors and labour unions: the move is typical of the functioning of the scientific and policy community forums at the EU level. The first, Ton Wilthagen (sociology professor at Tilburg University) was involved in the Dutch debate. The second, Per Kongshøj Madsen (economics and political science professor at the universities of Copenhagen and, then, Aalborg) was involved in the Danish debate. In Denmark, consensual policy had been pursued with social partners (strictly speaking “labour market parties” in Danish) for a long time and the “importation” of *flexicurity* was easy. As late as in 1999, however, a Danish policy report ignored the term “flexicurity” altogether. Instead, it discussed the so-called *gyldne trekant* (golden triangle) of the Danish labour market. Especially due to Per K. Madsen’s borrowing of the word “flexicurity” in the early 2000s, the notion quickly became a rallying flag for Danes in the promotion of their model abroad, and most especially within the three EU forums. We will not discuss the fact that flexicurity had different social meanings in the two sets of forums, the Dutch and the Danish; what is of interest for the present analysis is that the initiation of the debate at the EU level provided the motive for the use and dissemination of the word “flexicurity” in the policy community, but also in the scientific forums at the EU level. Because national such forums are so increasingly interconnected, these debates had effects and counterparts in many countries.

In the initial stages of the diffusion of the term “flexicurity” in EU social policy language, Wilthagen aimed at formulating a sociological theory of flexicurity in the scientific forum; he presented flexicurity as a “strategy” of certain actors (Wilthagen, 1998) that could favour the advent of “transitional markets,” a concept borrowed from Günther Schmid (1993). He subsequently theorized flexicurity as a *nexus* – a social nexus he compared to the regulationist concept of wage-earner nexus (2002, p. 3). As the policy community forum at the EU level became increasingly interested in the concept, in 2004, Wilthagen presented it in a more pragmatic mode, as a “matrix” linking various “forms” of flexicurity and security and combining them. By 2007, he was an official expert and rapporteur of a working group composed primarily of economists. On his side, Madsen started from the “golden triangle” of the labour market, describing it as a virtuous nexus existing between low employment protection, high unemployment benefits, and efficient active labour market policies able to foster the training and requalification of workers.

What characterizes social policy language at the EU level is that it originates in national forums and diffuses across the EU forums towards other national forums, but also cross-national ones. Starting in 2004, flexicurity became an object for benchmarking countries in the OECD’s *Employment Outlook* (Barbier, 2007). Finally, the incorporation of flexicurity into EU social policy language also illustrates the fact that the multidisciplinary situation of the EU scientific forums pushes to the background any theoretical-definitional effort. Because mainstream economic thought did not care about precise definitions of what was seen merely as a “mechanism” without precise actors, sociologists were at pains to air their claim that insufficient conceptual research would make the alleged “reconciliation”

of flexibility and security largely illusory: the wage-earner nexus was certainly not significantly altered by random and hotchpotch reforms introduced in various countries under the magic label of flexicurity (Barbier, 2007). Instead, we observe the temporary – faddish – triumph of a buzzword in the policy community forum. Emerging cross-disciplinary controversies were not welcome in the EU scientific, English-speaking forum.

Workfare and "activation"

Under the *apparently uniform* political banner of "workfare", "welfare-to-work" and "activation," in the late 1980s, reforms were implemented in countries such as France and the United States. These reforms then spread to a larger group of countries and caught the attention of experts and policymakers, with the term "activation" becoming one of the most typical words in EU social policy language. One can trace the travels of "activation" and "workfare" at the EU level and in some of the forums identified previously.

In the scientific forums – both national and EU-level, despite 20 years of the dissemination of policies that were called "active" or "activating" by politicians, "activation" *per se* has never become a rigorous sociological concept (Barbier, 2002; 2008). Nevertheless, it has enjoyed constant currency within the EU's policy community forums. In these forums, "activation" has been used within the economics and political science literature, as well as in political communication –especially in the discourse promoted by international organisations such as the OECD, as a code word for decreasing social benefits (on this issue, see Rianne Mahon's chapter on the OECD in this volume). The term "activation" expresses a normative objective set by politicians, who contend that "activation" is a good thing for European citizens in general. Politicians have received much backing in this respect from the academic community, most notably mainstream economists, sometimes directly intervening in national political communication forums.[14] While this intervention took place before the 2008 financial crisis, the concept has remained. In the political use of the term, "activation" has logically remained ill-defined and fuzzy. "Active policies" may be seen as only one part of "activation" in general. Other components of "activation" include "active labour market policies"; "welfare to work" schemes in the UK (for the disabled, youth, single parents, etc.); "*aktivering*" in Denmark; and "*insertion"* programmes in France. All these programmes apparently belong to the same type and are seen as such in the EU policy community forum, but the use of the term never spilled over significantly into the EU level political communication forum.[15]

Again, as in the case of flexicurity, the EU scientific forum was not really interested in precise definitions and here, too, the quick-fix characterizations of mainstream economics were seen as sufficient. More seriously, "activation of social protection" (Barbier, 2002; 2008) can be understood in the context of the welfare state restructuring approach (Pierson, 2001), where it constitutes one of the many dimensions of the restructuring tendencies affecting (with various incidence) all social policy systems in developed countries. Before the recent crisis, the tendency to "activate social protection" had been linked to the economic rationale of the reforms in an era of austerity and of the domination of the neoliberal paradigm. This was never really explicitly accepted in the policy

[14] One typical instance is Lord Richard Layard's intervention in the French election campaign, "Unemployment, France should follow European ways", Telos, February, 7, 2007 (accessed October, 5th, 2012). http://www.telos-eu.com/en/article/unemployement_france_should_follow_european_ways

[15] This is very different in Denmark, where one of the original words was created: *aktivering*.

community forums at the EU level, where the tradition is to treat economic and social policies separately. Logically, the mainstream debate in these forums, and also – but marginally – in the political communication forum, have focussed on the question of "activating" the poor and the unemployed. In EU social policy language, the main message was to stress the introduction (or the re-activation/reinforcement) of an explicit linkage between gaining/retaining access to social protection and labour market participation.

A second aspect is important to stress with regard to the close interconnection of the EU level and the national forums. While the "activation of social protection" displayed characteristics of change, it was never entirely new. This is no surprise, because the EU social policy language cannot exist without clear historical roots in nations. As is well known, for instance, "active labour market policies" first emerged in Sweden (Barbier, 2008). Systems of social protection in Europe – even the most "de-commodified" ones – had always been based upon some variety of full employment, and they had always been "activated" *de facto*: there was a strong link between employment and access to benefits across countries. Since the 19th century, social protection schemes have included job search obligations and employment history. However, the notion of "activation" was not (or seldom) used in the national forums: the EU (and international) forums (both scientific and policy community) helped create the opportunity for existing policies to be *discursively* reinterpreted. For instance, workfare in the United States and the *Revenu Minimum d'Insertion* in France (both adopted on a significant scale in 1988) became known as "activation policies" after this new discursive fad was disseminated from Denmark (1993) and by New Labour (1997) in the UK. Hence the "new activation" is typical of the functioning of the EU-level forums. Actually, it has only been new to the extent that the existing linkage was reinforced or introduced for some programs where had not been present *directly*. In the EU forums, however, the "newness" of the reforms was promoted, even in an overblown manner. At the system-level, the change appeared explicitly when governments talked about transforming the architecture of existing social policy systems into "active welfare states", enhancing the systemic role of what is known as "paid work" in international English.[16]

It is worth noting that before the vocabulary of "activation" firmly took hold in the EU languages of social policy, a differently framed debate focused on "workfare" was going on within the transnational scientific forum. However, when analyses of the ongoing reforms kept piling up (Morel, 1996; Morel, 2000, Lødemel, 2004), it became clear that there existed very different ways to "activate the poor", and the EU forum turned to "activation" instead of sticking to workfare. In the political communication forum, this turn of events also offered important advantages, because, despite its "cross-party" political backing in the U.S. linking the Nixon and the Clinton eras, the American connotation of workfare nevertheless carried with it the bad reputation of forced labour (Barbier, 2002). Shedding the term "workfare" was also convenient within the British political communication forum, where actors such as the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) had been manifesting support for the main Labour reforms introduced in the UK after 1997, i.e., the New Deals programmes and extension of tax credits. The TUC certainly did not want to be associated with U.S.-style programmes, and they would later signal that the 2008 reforms were to be opposed as the "introduction of workfare" in the UK. Workfare was definitely too blunt and too "foreign" (U.S.-born) a concept for using in the euphemistic political language of the EU forums.

[16] In German (die *Beschäftigung*) and in French (*l'emploi*) the counterpart concepts have very different connotations.

Social Investment

Sociology tends to be uneasy with macro-concepts that originate from political struggles. There is an increasing list of such concepts flying around in the EU forums: "activation", "flexicurity", and "workfare" are among them, as well as many others, like "modernisation of social protection". We shall end this short illustration with the concept of "social investment". The use of the term is illustrative of the *mélange des genres* existing between scientific and policy community forums. With it, social scientists and politicians seem to use the same and only language of seemingly reasonable, de-politicized reform at the EU level.

On the scientific side, though, the proponents of the notion of "social investment" have never been entirely clear as to what the concept did and did not encompass. Its invention has been attributed to Anthony Giddens in 1998, then Blair's policy guru, even if the phrase "social investment" had been used before. What is certain is that, strictly speaking, social investment has never been a social science concept in the sense of a French "*concept*" or a German "*Begriff*" (Jenson, 2009, p. 41, proposed to label it a "quasi-concept"). Nowadays, it is clearly a political notion expressed in international English in the EU policy community forum, but rarely used in the political communication forum, despite its success in Britain. The difference certainly has to do with the widely different functioning of political communication at the national and EU levels. In both cases, "social investment" was inserted by Blairians, as was the term "social inclusion", after the rejection of "social exclusion" in the late 1990s, because its meaning had value for British people, a value and a signification it could never achieve for a cross-national public in the EU. Hence, in contrast with "flexicurity" and even "activation", "social investment" can function only as a technical, specialized term for English-speaking elites.

At a certain level of abstraction, the notion of an "enabling state", initially coined by Neil and Barbara Gilbert (1989[17]) was very similar, although applied only to the U.S. (and not to Europe, although Gilbert later extended the "enabling state" to Europe). Morel *et al.* (2011, p. 1, 8) acknowledge the similarity of both approaches, a similarity that should be explored in greater detail. These authors nevertheless reached the conclusion that there were actually at least two polar approaches to social investment, one "social-democratic" another "third-way," which coexist under the same "umbrella" (ibid., p. 19), a very large umbrella indeed. For his part, contributing to the EU policy community forum, Hemerijck (2012) did not address the definitional aspect of the question. In a symposium, he *implicitly* defined "social investment" by distinguishing what he called "social investment spending" from "non-social investment spending" (ibid., p. 21-24), admitting that there was no "agreed definition of social investment spending" (ibid.). The author did not provide a precise justification as to why state outlays for "old-age, survivors, disability pensions, excluding the rehabilitation expenses, and unemployment spending thus excluding expenses on active labour market programmes" (p. 21) should be seen as "non-social investment". From a normative and political standpoint, the potential implications of this list of programs excluded from "social investment" are extremely problematic. But this discussion is a good illustration of the *mélange des genres* that prevails in the EU forums. Because of the lack of rigorous social policy concepts and languages,

[17] The Gilberts' basic motto was "public support for private responsibility", as Gilbert (1995, p. 153) later wrote.

because of the impoverishment brought by the exclusive usage of European English, genuine scientific discussions are discouraged. These discussions nevertheless survive in academic publications, hopefully, as the alternative interpretations of "social investment" have shown (De la Porte and Jacobsson, 2011; Cantillon, 2011; Morel *et al.*, 2011).

Conclusion

Formulated in European English, social policy languages at the EU level express the state of compromises and battles fought for by narrow elites intervening in three distinct types of forums (political communication, policy community and scientific). Each of these forums has special features, but they all are linked together. And irrespective of their original status (scientists, politicians, administrators, journalists, and activists), actors may belong to several of them. The conditions of production of these languages profoundly influence their nature, and they are never cut off from their deep cultural-historical roots or national origins. However, it is important for social scientists to cast a critical look at the continual production of new concepts and terms linked to the specific type of politics taking place at the EU level.

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